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On the whole, we see no present prospect, that the teaching of articulation will be introduced into our institutions at all; and that exercises in it will ever be made general, we cannot believe. Our own experience, and the still more costly experience of the Parisian school, loudly admonish us not to abandon a system which we have practised, or seen practised, for a quarter of a century, and which has been found to answer all the reasonable expectations formed from it, — to adopt a system which we believe to be founded on an erroneous philosophy, and the results of which, judging from all the evidence before us, we believe to have been, on an average at least, less favorable than the results attained under our own plan.

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ART. IV. — *The Complete Poetical Works of WILLIAM WORDSWORTH*. Philadelphia: James Kay, Jr., & Brother. 8vo. 1837.

THE imaginative literature of the present century is a subject which criticism has not yet exhausted. At the period in which its great works were produced, many causes prevented them from being judged in a spirit of fairness. The acknowledgment of an author's merit depended, to a great extent, on personal and political considerations. Malignity and partisanship both warped the straight line of analysis. The numerous disquisitions which have appeared, since these passions have been somewhat allayed, have still left room for individual diversities of opinion. We have thought, that a view of the character and tendencies of the imaginative literature of the present age, in connection with the individual and poetical characters of its four great exponents, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, and Scott, would not be distasteful to our readers. We have selected these from the large army of contemporary poets, because in this, as in other armies, we must look to the leaders for the direction of the march and the conduct of the war. We commence with Wordsworth.

Literature has its ebb and flow, its periods of plenty and barrenness, of progress and retrogression. At one time,

we observe a race of authors spring up, as if by magic, who reflect and modify current tastes and opinions, give a new energy to all departments of letters, become the founders of a school of literature, and trail after them an admiring body of disciples and imitators. But their influence gradually decays. The spirit that animated their writings dies out. New ideas and new ideals take possession of the national mind. Those of the school, who remain, copy their masters' manner, without catching any of their masters' soul. Then generally follows a period of mental sterility, — a weary waste in intellectual history, dotted by only a few spots of verdure and beauty. Soon, however, a reaction commences. The dulness and debility consequent upon a cringing and servile admiration of past merit gradually provoke the best natured "reading public" into wrath. A new order or development of literature supplants the old, — a literature more affected by contemporary events and opinions, more expressive of the advancing character of the people, more original and bold. This, again, when emancipated from the slavery of the past, exercises its tyranny upon the future.

These facts account in some degree for the wide diversities observable in the intellectual history of civilized nations. In one age, we find the loftiest genius, in another, the meanest mediocrity, in the high places of letters. Edmund Spenser, John Dryden, Colley Cibber, Henry James Pye, and Robert Southey have all been poet-laureates of England. The age of Pericles, of Augustus, of Lorenzo de Medici, of Queen Anne, periods of peculiar brilliancy in literary annals, were succeeded by times in which imitation, rather than creation, was the poet's boast. A great author thus establishes a kind of despotism over his successors. The freedom of their minds is trammelled by the canons of taste deduced from his writings. Until imitation has run into a spiritless mannerism, and given over the domain of letters to elegant imbecility or galvanized common-place, it is rare that the reaction commences ; and when it does occur, it is often accompanied by those wild excesses which stain most rebellions against established power.

Thus it was, in some degree, with that rebellion against what is absurdly called the correct school of poetry, which has occurred within the last fifty years. It is hardly possi-

ble for any person to contrast the torpid formality and florid feebleness, which characterized most of the current rhyme of the last half-century, with the vigor, the broad scope, the earnestness, the sensibility, the intellectual and moral power, which distinguish the poetry of the present age, without being led into an inquiry concerning the causes of so wide a difference. It seems as if the dead body of literature had been touched by the hand of an enchanter, and had sprung upon its feet. To whatever department of literature we turn, we find it swarming with occupants. Signs of mental life and energy meet and reward the eye in every direction. Every thing we see tells us, that the paralysis which struck the inventive powers of the past generation has not benumbed the imagination of our own. The poet has once more ceased to worship fashion and metre, and returned to nature and truth. The scales have fallen from his eyes, and he can see; the fetters have dropped from his limbs, and he can move; the burden has passed away from his soul, and he can soar.

It is impossible to frame any general laws which shall comprehend all the phenomena that precede or accompany a change in the character of a national literature. But there were various causes, some obvious, some recondite, and all in harmony with historical truth, which undoubtedly influenced the character of the poetry that sprang up on the ruins of the critical and artificial school of the time of Queen Anne. That way of writing had miserably degenerated in the compositions of its disciples. All that was admirable in Pope, its great master, could not be reproduced. The keen, searching satire, the brilliant wit, the teeming fancy, the sharp compression of style, which characterized the little man of Twickenham, were beyond imitation; but the flow of his verse, and the artifice of his manner, were not so difficult of attainment. These merely required a good ear and an empty heart; two things which are wonderfully common in all ages. As a matter of course, poetry became feeble and melodious, refined and trite, heartless and genteel. Most of the poems formed on Pope's model made a smooth descent into that nothingness from which they had so daintily arisen, hardly attracting sufficient attention to "pay the expenses of their journey to oblivion." The last faint echo of the "Rape of the Lock" was given in the "Triumphs

of Temper" of the "amiable" Hayley. During the sixty years which followed the death of Pope, the few good poems which have journeyed down to the present time can hardly be said to have been indebted to his example for any of their merits. They were angel visits, infrequent though celestial sights, to a generation dull and dead to high poetic feeling.

The revolution, however, came at last. The attention of men, sick of monotony and debility, was turned to the earlier and palmy days,—the true Augustan age of English literature,—to that wonderful band of authors which adorned the reign of Elizabeth,—to Shakspeare, Jonson, Fletcher, Spenser, and Bacon. The vast stores of meditation, imagination, and passion, contained in the works of the elder dramatists, were explored. The fine old English ballads, brimful of nature and truth, were placed side by side with the nerveless couplets of heroic rhymers. Burns and Cowper, each after his own way, had shown that there was something new to be said about nature and human life. The butterflies of the Della Cruscan school were broken on the wheel of Gifford's satire,—fit engine for such a work. Even the nonsensical sentimentalities imported from Germany indicated, that maudlin feeling and spurious energy were tolerated for the realities which they suggested as well as caricatured. Both in the work of demolition and in the blundering attempts at constructing anew, the same spirit was manifested.

The two principal causes of the change in the tone and character of literature were, probably, the French Revolution, and that tendency in the highest minds towards spiritualism, which was expressed in the revival of what is now vaguely called the "transcendental philosophy." These, likewise, gave the impulse to some of those agents in the work which we have before noted. Both exerted on the feelings and opinions of men a vast influence. Between the French Revolution, which was the child of French atheism, and the philosophy which reacted against it, there seems, on the first glance, to be little connection; yet no one can examine the poetry of the time without perceiving, that these two influences almost interpenetrate each other in their effect upon the national mind. They are seen in all the high imaginative literature which at all reflects the spirit of the age.

Of the influence of the "spiritual philosophy" it is difficult to speak here at sufficient length, or with any discrimination. It is a name applicable to a large number of systems, and often perversely applied to opinions which it does not cover. It is certain, however, that, during the period when poetry was most artificial and didactic, the current philosophy was far from being spiritual. Bolingbroke and Pope are the fit representatives of the speculation and the imagination of their age. The "Essay on Man," in which the thoughts and arguments are known to be Bolingbroke's, is a meet philosophical counterpart to the "Essay on Criticism." Berkeley's system is hardly an exception to the rule, for he stands as much apart from his time as Milton does from the time of Charles the Second. The reaction in Scotland and other countries against materialism may be said to have been occasioned by the necessities of natural religion, and the want experienced of a philosophy which should comprehend all the elements of human nature. Both in philosophy and poetry, there was a demand for something which prevalent systems had overlooked. The spirit of transcendental speculation deeply infects the poetry of Wordsworth, Shelley, Coleridge, Keats, and Tennyson, and partly that of Byron. It is the inspiration of the most popular verse produced in our own country. Were Pope's "Essay on Man" and Longfellow's "Voices of the Night" published here for the first time to-morrow, the "Voices" would attract ten times as many listeners as the "Essay." The fertile fancy, harmonious numbers, and brilliant epigrammatic turns of Pope would not compensate for his lack of mystical charm. This change from the sensual to the super-sensual in poetry has not been unattended by abuses as well as beauties. To read some metrical productions of the crude dabblers in spiritualism is a worse physical infliction than the nightmare or the toothache.

Pure spiritualism, as a system of philosophy, imposes on external nature the laws of the understanding or the reason; poetry imposes on nature the laws of the imagination. Both make the inner world of the mind paramount to the external world of matter. The purest poetry is that in which the imagination either evolves from material objects the latent spiritual meaning they secrete, or superadds to those objects thoughts and feelings which the senses cannot perceive as

residing in them. It thus transcends the sphere of the senses, and is, in a measure, transcendental. No definition of poetry can be more incorrect than that which confines it to imitation, in the usual sense of the word. Even in descriptive poetry, the forms and colors of nature are not imitated, but represented. The mind that describes is always predominant in the description, and gives as much as it takes. Two true poets would probably give an essentially different description of the same landscape. In truth, in the hands of the imagination, nature is a huge plaything, to be tossed about, and forced into whatever shape, and made to symbolize whatever sentiment, the sovereign faculty may impose. The poet, "of imagination all compact," stands before the vast universe of things, and makes it speak the language of his own heart and mind. Every thing stable, and fixed, and hard in matter becomes wax under his touch. All outward objects are colored by the hues of his feelings. He perceives nature rather with the internal than with the external senses. If his soul be darkened by despondency, he can spread a thunder-cloud over the serenest sky; if there be no sunshine in his heart, he can see no sun in the heavens. He sees with his soul rather than with his eye. One of the greatest poets that ever lived—we mean John Bunyan, homely as may be the associations connected with the inspired tinker's name—has left some most pertinent instances in his writings of the sway exercised by the imagination over the external senses. In describing the dark internal conflicts which convulsed him, during one stage of his religious experience, he says:—"I lifted up my head, and methought I saw as if the sun that shineth in the heavens did *grudge* to give me light; as if the very stones in the street, and tiles upon the houses, did band themselves against me." This is as perfect poetry as ever was written.

Thus all poetry must, to a great extent, be transcendental. If in delineating the forms of nature nothing is superadded, the result is always prose. The imagination ever vindicates the natural superiority of mind over matter, by the lordliness with which it changes the aspects of the material creation. In representing and combining outward objects, it stamps them with a new character. There is hardly a portion of earth which it has not decked with new colors. It has made the world we live in radiant with beauty, by clus-

tering its analogies around all the objects which meet our senses. There is scarcely a form of the visible world which bears not the mark of its celestial footprints. It opens a new revelation of loveliness in every thing it touches. A generation of poets never leave the world as they find it. It becomes a more blessed habitation to the humblest, for every bard who connects any of its forms, colors, and sounds with spiritual truths. Thus poetry ministers to that high aspiration in man for "a more ample greatness and exact goodness, the world being inferior to the soul."

All high imaginative poetry thus transcends the actual sphere of existence. But the poetry of the present age is distinguished by what may be called its philosophical as well as its imaginative character. It grasps at the solution of the dark problems of man's existence and destiny. It grapples with the doubts and fears which perplex the understanding. It watches the movements of the soul, intent on fixing and giving shape to the most fleeting shades of thought and emotion. It is even familiar with the dark and tangled paths of metaphysics. Nothing is too humble for its love, nothing too lofty for its aspirations. The peasant, the monarch, the thinker, are all represented in its creations and ideal forms. Its end is not merely to please, but to inspire and instruct. Whether dealing with skepticism or faith, whether confirming or shaking common belief, it is always in earnest. It is never content with the careless play of fancy, or the cold exercise of reason, on subjects which relate to God, man, and the universe. Its philosophy is not a dead formula, but a living faith, by which the value of institutions is to be tested, and in obedience to which all things must be ruled. It mingles with all the interests of mankind, and gives voice and form to its rights, its wrongs, and its aspirations. It is, as it were, the champion of humanity, declaring the infinite worth of the individual soul, and, both in anathemas and appeals, striking at all social and political despotisms. The force of its practical teachings, the influence of its lofty declarations of duty and freedom, depend on the fact, that man is a spiritual being, with thoughts and affections transcending the sensible world, and bearing a relation to a future as well as a present life.

Thus poetry, as it makes the material universe more beautiful and sublime by associating its properties with the



operations of the mind, has, also, especially in the present age, thrown new consecrations around the nature of man, and weakened the force of those slavish bonds of opinion, which bind the victim of the world's tyrannies more strongly than with chains. And this brings us to the consideration of the other grand event of the time, whose effect on the character of its imaginative literature is so great and obvious.

The opinions and contests to which the French Revolution gave rise stirred the mind of all Europe to its depths. This great convulsion left its traces deep in the works of almost every author. All changes in the habits, opinions, manners, government, and religion of society call for and create a new epoch in literature; and the revolution in France was especially calculated to produce that effect. In England, the new opinions and new aspirations, which the great social earthquake excited, affected, in some degree, all departments of letters. It was especially adapted to inflame the passions and stimulate the imagination. There was a general uprooting of every thing on which the moss of time had gathered. "What was gray with age" was to men no longer "godlike." Bold questions were put to all forms of religion, political institutions, and social arrangements. A new train of thoughts, hopes, fears, and sentiments passed into the heart and brain of society, and became the inspiration of its literature. Events were constantly occurring, to which no parallel could be found in European history. Fierce and turbulent contests, on the field of battle or in the halls of debate, kept curiosity and wonder constantly awake.

It is evident, that such a time as this was not the period for florid imbecilities and harmonious sentimentalities, — for lines addressed to imaginary Chloes and Daphnes, and for the fooleries of courtly affectation. There was a sturdy democracy of readers demanding something more fiery and daring, or something more hearty and true. The naked energy of unchecked passions for once had full play. Great revolutions, threatening the ancient order of things, and promising the reconstruction of the world, opened fresh fields for the imagination. There had been no period in modern history, when those mighty external causes, generally supposed to stimulate the powers of the poet into intensest action, were in such uncontrollable operation as in the inter-

val between the years 1790 and 1820. During that period, but principally in the last ten years of it, the great works of imagination, which are the glory of our time, appeared. In them we discover all the conservative and radical elements, which were rife among the people, sublimed by genius.

It is certain, that the moral agencies which the Revolution awoke were among its most marked results. It led to the study and assertion of first principles, and to their promulgation with all the combined energy of reason, imagination, and passion. If the spiritual element, to which we have before alluded, had not pervaded the poetry of the time, it is probable that mere passion would have been predominant, and that the literature would have "foamed itself to air." As it was, almost all the characteristics of the age were reflected in its poetry. The sentiment of humanity, of freedom, of sorrow, of disquietude, — all the virtues, sins, errors, faiths, skepticisms of the time, — its good and its evil, its happiness and misery, its religion and irreligion, — are seen, in a greater or less degree, in the works of Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, Southey, Coleridge, and many of less note. We also perceive a prevailing earnestness and intensity of feeling, in some cases rising to agony and desperation, in these writings. Most of them display the individual peculiarities of their authors, and are colored by personal feelings. Each opens some new mines of imagination, or penetrates deeper into those but partially explored. The intellectual energy displayed in most of them is in fine contrast with the feebleness and timid elegance of the poets they supplanted. Even those, who differ most in the character of their minds and opinions, appear influenced by similar causes. The whole literature, indeed, gives evidence of the mighty commotions of the period in which it was produced, and of the numerous agencies which concurred in its formation. In no other age of the world's history were poets characterized by so much subjective action of the mind, and such marked individuality; yet in no other age did they represent so truly the character and tendencies of common feeling and opinion.

First in point of time, and, in the opinion of many, first in point of genius, among the poets of this period, we must place Wordsworth, the pioneer of the new school, for many years its martyr, and now its patriarch. His life, for the

last fifty years, has been spent in thinking, writing, and acting poetry. To him, more than to any other, are we indebted for the return of the divine art to its true domain, — the soul of man and external nature. Born, as he boasts, in a mountainous country, and exposed from his youth to the influences of sublime and ennobling scenery, he early discovered the difference between the poetry of words and the poetry of things. He was fitted by nature and education for the duties and trials of a reformer. More disposed to look within than without for guidance and approval ; plain, manly, independent ; unconquerable by injustice or even by ridicule ; and free from that servitude to popular caprice which makes the popular author of to-day and the forgotten author of to-morrow ; he was eminently calculated to exercise that moral pride which enables a poet to defy contemporary criticism, to retort contemporary scorn, and to labor on a work “ in the full assurance that it would be unpopular, and in the full assurance that it would be immortal.” His theory of poetic diction, which discarded the peculiar language and jargon of verse, and substituted for it the language of real life, sprang from the simplicity and sincerity of his nature ; and if we take his own style as the illustration of the true scope and meaning of his system, we can there discover its strongest defence ; for though his diction may lack the incessant glow and glare of Byron’s and Shelley’s, it is never, in his best works, deficient in splendor and compass. He seems to have begun life with the determination to take nothing at second-hand. It was his object to look nature and man directly in the face, and record his impressions of both without regard to established metrical customs. He was undoubtedly one-sided in the view he took of many of his predecessors ; but the evils against which he contended were so great, that nothing but the extreme opposite to the prevailing fashions could correct them. The same enthusiasm and energy of will, which make a man a reformer, make him likewise something of a fanatic.

In his youth, Wordsworth partook of the golden hopes of universal emancipation current among all the imaginative minds of his day ; and, with Coleridge and Southey, consumed much time in building Utopian theories of government and “pantisocracies” out of the very inanities of democracy. They had an open sense for all that was poetical in the con-

tests and opinions springing from the French Revolution. Their theories of poetry, though at first somewhat narrow, possessed the advantage of erring in the right direction. They spurned at the old tricks and gauds of diction, and adopted homeliness in their language as well as in many of their subjects. Nature was the goddess of their adoration. Men and women, as distinguished from lords and ladies, they delighted to honor. They were liberal almost to illiberality. Their adventurous daring consisted in attempting to make those persons and objects which produce physical disgust the means of poetic pleasure. They put souls into dogs, horses, rabbits, and other equally intelligent brutes, and made them the organs of juster sentiments than were uttered in "polite" society. All animals seemed nobler in their eyes than fops and fribbles, though, by a course of very subtile reasoning, fops and fribbles can be demonstrated to be human beings. Indeed, they appeared as the advocates of all things that had fallen under the tyranny of prejudice and harsh opinion. They adopted the quarrel of man and nature against men and society. They were the true democrats of poetry. For the first time, in their writings, the *sans-culotte* trod on poetic feet. All the great virtues and dear immunities of human nature, self-denial, love, charity, faith, piety, goodness, they delighted to represent in the poor and the ignorant, — in those whom poetry before had merely pitied, and whom the dainty spirits of a former age had even stigmatized as "low." They forsook palaces for huts, and were eminently poets of the poor. Neither rags, nor coarseness of manners and clothes, nor even bad taste and worse grammar, could conceal from these literary innovators the inborn grandeur and beauty of the human soul. They committed many errors, and slid into some puerilities; but they deserve the highest praise for passing by the delusions of conventional glitter and pomp, to pour out the full freshness of their young hearts, and the full richness of their fertile imaginations, on objects which pride had before denied to be worthy of poetic adornment; and, by that consecrating power which belongs only to genius, to cast the drapery of the beautiful over what was externally mean and unsightly.

It would be no pleasant task to describe the steps by which these three juvenile republicans became Tories. From

their companionship in youth, they were classed together as poets, after a more extensive range over the domain of reason and imagination had separated them in taste and manner. Wordsworth alone seems to have adhered steadily to his poetical principles. In his case, the child was ever "the father of the man." To him, we think, belongs the praise of giving its distinctive spiritual character to the imaginative literature of the age. His position is so prominent among the poets of his time that it cannot be overlooked. Verbal critics may be shocked at some of his phrases, and deny him any merit on account of a few trivial epithets. Worldlings may sneer at the simplicity of some of his delineations of rural life. Truculent poetasters, boiling over with the frenzy of a pot-house inspiration, may charge him with a lack of power. But the fact remains, that few poets of the present age have escaped his influence, and that he has stamped the character of his muse indelibly on their writings. He gave, or largely assisted in giving, that tendency to the poetic mind, which produced, at a later period, the magnificent creations of Byron and Shelley.

The originality of Wordsworth, and the priority of his claims to be considered the leader of the poets of his time, we should be inclined to base on the lines written in 1798, during a visit to the ruins of Tintern Abbey. There is one passage in this poem which is, perhaps, the most remarkable in his writings. After describing the manner in which the forms and colors of nature affected his youth, and the "dizzy raptures and aching joys" to which they ministered, when they were to him "as an appetite, and haunted him like a passion," — when, in his enjoyment of their beauty and grandeur, they needed no interest "unborrowed of the eye," — he proceeds to indicate the new aspect under which they appear to him, since

"Impulses of deeper birth  
Have come to him in solitude,"

and his mind has held mysterious communion with their inward spirit :

"For I have learned  
To look on nature, not as in the hour  
Of thoughtless youth ; but hearing oftentimes  
The still, sad music of humanity,  
Nor harsh, nor grating, though of ample power

To chasten and subdue. And I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts ; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean, and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man ;  
A motion, and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things."

It certainly was a great advance from Pope for a poet to have "an appetite and a passion" for external nature. But this alone would not have constituted any peculiar claim to originality. In the "sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused," in the feeling, that, behind the forms, hues, and sounds of the material universe, there is something more than meets the external senses, — something which defies analysis, undefined and ineffable, which must be felt and perceived by the soul, — in this intense spiritualism, mingled with the mildest and sweetest humanity, we see the influence, and acknowledge the power, of Wordsworth. No such feeling seems to have stirred the consciousness of Pope, of Gray, of Collins, of Goldsmith, of Burns, or of Cowper ; and it is doubtful if it can be found in the great poems of the Elizabethan era. To some, it may appear nothing more than the poetry of pantheism. To some, it may seem utterly unintelligible. It was a greater stumbling-block in the way of the northern critics of Wordsworth than his alleged vulgarities and trivialities. But nothing is more certain than that it is this spirit which pervades the highest branches of imaginative literature, and is the inspiration of many a passage in Byron which is read with continual delight. It has passed from the summits of poetry to mingle with the interests and contests of society. It is, perhaps, the unconscious inspirer both of much of the radicalism and much of the conservatism of the age. It affects the theological, the metaphysical, and even the physical speculations of the day. In theology, it is the parent of many a hotly contested dispute on "the spirit and the letter" of Christianity. Indeed, the disposition, everywhere observable, to look beneath the forms to the spirit, not only of nature, but of institutions and modes of faith, is the same in substance with that which is expressed in the celebrated lines of Wordsworth. This habit has led to some queer developments, where it has been unsparingly exercised.

In this transcendental region of poetry, Wordsworth is rather a listener than a seer. He hears unearthly tones, rather than sees unearthly shapes. The vagueness and indistinctness of the impression which the most beautiful and sublime passages of his works leave upon the mind is similar to that which is conveyed by the most exquisite music. His is not often the thought

“ Which pierces this dim universe like *light*.”

His description of indefinite emotions and subtle ideas is so expressed as to be heard by the soul, rather than seen by mental vision. It awakes a certain mysterious and unspeakable delight, which we can refer to none of the common sources of emotion. To one who is insensible to the mystical charm of Wordsworth's writings, — who is incapable of receiving pleasure except from palpable images and turbulent passions, — a great part of the beauty of his finest poetry must be lost. Few have ever exceeded him in the exquisite delicacy of his sense of sound. Those passages,

“ Through which the ear converses with the heart,”

are, in his nature, ever open to external tones and voices. In his own words,

“ A spirit aerial  
Informs the cell of hearing” ;

and this spiritual functionary translates to his soul all the music of the universe into the language of the affections and the imagination. It hears

“ Humanity, in groves and fields,  
Pipe solitary anguish” ;

it enables him to perceive

“ The voice of Deity, on height and plain,  
Whispering those truths in stillness, which the WORD  
To the four quarters of the world proclaims ” ;

it declares that “ innumerable voices ” fill the heavens “ with everlasting harmony,” and that

“ The towering headlands, crowned with mist,  
Their feet among the billows, know  
That Ocean is a mighty harmonist ;  
Thy pinions, everlasting Air,  
Ever waving to and fro,  
Are delegates of harmony, and bear  
Strains that support the seasons in their round ;  
Stern Winter loves a dirge-like sound ” ;

it feels the mysterious power of music, and gives significance to that

“ Warbled air,  
Whose piercing sweetness can unloose  
The chains of frenzy, or entice a smile  
Into the ambush of despair ” ;

it reveres duty as the “ stern daughter of the voice of God,” and knows

“ A Voice to light gave being ;  
To Time, and Man, his earth-born chronicler ;  
A Voice shall finish doubt and dim foreseeing,  
And sweep away life's visionary stir.”

In that most refined of imaginations, —

“ Beauty, born of murmuring sound,  
Did pass into her face,” —

we are even more impressed with the marvellous delicacy of the “ spirit aerial ” in detecting the most mysterious and recondite influences of tone.

In this faculty of awaking sentiments of grandeur, sublimity, beauty, affection, devotion, in the mind of the reader, by giving voice and soul to unintelligent, and often to inanimate things, and making them act upon the mind through the subtlest feelings of our nature, it would be difficult to find a parallel to Wordsworth. It is evident, however, that the fineness of his imaginations requires thought and attention in the reader, to be perceived and appreciated. For this reason he has never been widely popular. Few are willing to abstract their minds from the daily routine of life, and bring them into harmony with that of the poet. Wordsworth wrote as if all other men looked upon the universe with his eyes. It has been well remarked, that what he said like a recluse, Lord Byron said like a man of the world. The men of the world called the former a meaningless mystic, and the latter an inspired bard.

Wordsworth did not merely consider poetry as an instrument of pleasure, as a thing which men should write or read in their hours of recreation ; but he deemed it an art, to which a long life might be profitably devoted, and that, if need were, it should have its martyrs as well as its disciples. Religion, government, society, science, philosophy, life, he observed through a poetic medium. The imagination he considered the most divine of our faculties. He gave to its



visions the authenticity of revelations. It conducted the soul to heights which yielded

“Far-stretching views into eternity.”

God, man, and the universe could be read aright only through the vision of this marvellous power. “It is conscious,” he remarks, “of an indestructible dominion ; — *the soul may fall away from it*, not being able to endure its grandeur ; but if once felt and acknowledged, by no act of any other faculty of the mind can it be relaxed, impaired, or diminished.” The understanding ever leads astray, when it denies and rejects the imagination. It resolves every thing into unconnected parts ; it never, unaided, can penetrate to unity. “The pride of intellect and thought” he is continually rebuking, and continually bringing up to its view mysteries which it cannot explain. He says, in reference to some of the “great discoverers” in physical and mental science,

“O, there is laughter at their work in heaven !”

and he exclaims,

“Inquire of ancient wisdom ; go, demand  
Of mighty Nature, if ’t was ever meant  
That we should pry far off, yet be unraised ;  
That we should pore, and dwindle as we pore,  
Viewing all objects unremittingly  
In disconnection, dead and spiritless ;  
And still dividing and dividing still,  
Break down all grandeur, still unsatisfied  
With the perverse attempt, while littleness  
May yet become more little ; waging thus  
An impious warfare with the very life  
Of our own souls. And if, indeed, there be  
An all-pervading Spirit, upon whom  
Our dark foundations rest, could he design  
That this magnificent effect of power,  
The earth we tread, the sky that we behold  
By day, and all the pomp which night reveals,  
That these — and that superior mystery,  
Our vital frame, so fearfully devised,  
And the dread soul within it — should exist  
Only to be examined, pondered, searched,  
Probed, vexed, and criticized ?”

It has been supposed that the Supreme Being, whom Wordsworth contemplates, is *produced* by the imagination and affections. Some, who have objected, on this supposition, to “The Excursion,” as a work which accomplishes nothing in divinity and philosophy, have overlooked one important distinction in the poet’s notion of imagination. This

faculty, with him, not only combines, creates, and produces, but is gifted with insight into the objective realities of the spiritual world. It sees and hears, as well as makes. In one of his sonnets, he refers to it as overleaping walls and gulfs of mystery to the Infinite object.

“ The universe is infinitely wide,  
And conquering reason, if self-glorified,  
Can nowhere move uncrossed by some new wall  
Or gulf of mystery, which thou alone,  
Imaginative Faith ! canst overleap  
In progress toward the fount of Love.”

With this high sense of the uses of the imagination, with this idea of his art as

“ The vision and the faculty divine,”

it is not singular that Wordsworth's self-reliance was never shaken by calumny, sarcasm, and neglect. He felt that he had a great purpose to perform in life, and he bent his energies to it unshrinkingly. He lived in times of vast excitement and turmoil, when the fountains of the great deep of opinion were broken up, and the world was in disorder and commotion, deluged with all varieties of sects and systems. There was an incessant activity of the mind and passions, without any definite resting-place. There was vehemence in asserting and defending opinions, without an assured faith in their truth. The material and spiritual elements at work in society were mutually clashing. He had experienced deeply these outward influences, though the fineness of his affections had preserved him from their harsher manifestations. His writings must be considered with reference to the state of opinion and the outward events of his time. Even when his mind seems most abstracted from real life, and flutters dizzy over the vanishing points of human intelligence, we can perceive that his lofty idealism is assumed for the purpose of opposing some modes of thought, or orthodoxies of action, which he deemed the sins and follies of the period. There is a controversial air around his poetry. The pressure of surrounding circumstances evidently quickened his intellect, not to give an echo, but a warning. He desired to teach a philosophy of the whole nature of man, in which the imagination and the affections should be predominant, and by which the relation of man and the external universe to each other and to God might be displayed “in words that move in metrical array.” He hoped to soothe

and harmonize the soul, by opening to it unexplored regions of loveliness and delight ; by accustoming it to the contemplation of the majesty of the universe ; by showing the essential littleness implied in the indulgence of stormy individual passions ; and by healing those miseries which have their sources in the fret and stir of conventional life. He saw that a vast proportion of the calamities of existence arise from the exaggerated estimate which each individual makes of himself, and the desire of "each to be all." For this individualism he would substitute the sentiment of humanity. No one yields to him in the loftiness of his views respecting the capacity and destiny of the human soul ; yet he is careful to preserve this from the taint of vanity and pride.

Wordsworth professes to find the materials of poetry in the common and familiar things of existence. We think, that, in a majority of cases, these common and familiar things are made poetical by his own mind. He superadds more than he evolves from them. He sees objects as they are blended with his own thoughts and imaginations. The common, to him, is full of mystery, and is linked by a chain of mysterious association with the most exalted and kindling truths. Beauty, sublimity, and romance are, to his mind, confined to no period or country, but are ever the attendants of man and nature.

" Paradise and groves  
Elysian, Fortunate Fields, — like those of old  
Sought in the Atlantic main, — why should they be  
A history only of departed things,  
Or a mere fiction of what never was ?  
For the discerning intellect of man,  
When wedded to this goodly universe  
In love and holy passion, shall find these  
A simple produce of the common day.  
I, long before the blissful hour arrives,  
Would chant, in lonely peace, the spousal verse  
Of this great consummation ; and by words  
*Which speak of nothing more than what we are,*  
Would I arouse the sensual from their sleep  
Of death, and win the vacant and the vain  
To noble raptures."

In the same spirit he speaks of the beautiful.

" Beauty — a living Presence of the earth,  
Surpassing the most fair ideal forms  
Which craft of delicate spirits hath composed  
From earth's materials — waits upon my steps,  
*Pitches her tents before me as I move,*  
An hourly neighbour."

We perceive throughout Wordsworth a kind of unconscious distinction preserved between man and men. There is no limit to his confidence in the first, but he is inclined to scan the second with distrust and suspicion. In one of Godwin's essays, reference is made to some rascal "who has the audacity to call himself A MAN." In Wordsworth's mind there appears something of this feeling, though in a milder form. The conventional man, whose nature is distorted by the world's vices both in action and speculation, and who is unwedded to the universe in "love and holy passion," is a perversion of man. Hence his strong tendency to consider the elements of human nature, rather than human nature as modified by society. Hence his lack of dramatic power. He is a moral critic of men, rather than a delineator of character. When he takes pedlers and potters for heroes, they are not those of real life, but pedlers and potters after a type in his own imagination. And even then they have little congruity, except that which comes from the consistency of their acts and discourses. Ever aiming at man in the simplicity of his nature, all that can be said of his characters is, that they are not men, but man, — and man after Wordsworth's image.

Much has been written in praise of Wordsworth's philosophy. If we consider philosophy as the product of the understanding, — as an induction from facts carefully collected and rigidly analyzed, — it seems to us that Wordsworth's claim to distinction among metaphysicians must be small. He does not reason up to principles, or down from principles, but he proclaims and asserts principles. A reasoner would not be influenced at all by the theories of God and the universe scattered over his works. In short, he pursues the poetic rather than the philosophic method. His disposition to sneer at exclusive reason, and his deficiency in that dramatic imagination, by which a poet conceives beings differently constituted from himself, and lives for the time with their thoughts and feelings, would naturally narrow his philosophy of human life to the range of his own experience, and restrict the authority of his metaphysical teachings to those whose minds saw things in the same light in which they were viewed by himself. Shelley says, that a man, "to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively ;

he must put himself in the place of another, and of many others ; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own." Now, the pains and pleasures of the species Wordsworth desires to make his own ; but in making them his own, he makes them *Wordsworthian*. The pains and pleasures that the race ought to feel, rather than those which they do feel, are represented in his writings. And it is the same with Shelley.

But the objection which would be made to Wordsworth as a philosopher is the inconsistency of his statements. From the observation of certain mental phenomena, awakened by some mysterious external influences, the Platonic doctrine of preëxistence has been inferred ; the contemplations of other philosophers have led them to pantheism ; the meditations of others have resulted in the acknowledgment of a Supreme Infinite Being. Now, in Wordsworth we perceive each of these systems poetically stated. They have a poetical consistency, as they were the melodious utterances of the bard, when the phenomena from which each is inferred pressed most heavily on his spirit. But it is evident, that a philosopher would have attempted to harmonize these by a process of reasoning. He would never have admitted them into his system, without modifying the character of each in such a manner, that they would form one consistent theory. But with the poet it is different. He feels more intensely at some periods than he does at others the different states of mind which each system represents, and he pours out the thoughts and impulses of the moment as if they constituted his whole nature. He sees, or thinks he sees, hears, or thinks he hears, in the visible or in the transcendental world, certain truths ; and he gives them shape, sound, or hue, without regard to their limitations in reason.

The intensity with which Wordsworth undoubtedly meditates has probably done much to give him a great reputation as a reasoner ; but between reasoning and meditation we conceive there is a marked difference, especially in the action of a poetical mind. We believe, that, if "The Excursion" were stripped of its radiant dress of imagination, and reduced to a plain prose treatise on ethics and metaphysics, it would be acknowledged to contain many common and important, and many subtile, truths ; but to present, on the

whole, quite an unphilosophical blending of assertion and deduction, resulting in inharmonious and contradictory theories.

It is as a poet, therefore, rather than as a philosopher, that Wordsworth is to be considered ; for when he deals with the themes of philosophy, he pursues the poetical method. The question, whether this method be the correct one, or whether the things which it proclaims from insight be entitled to rank among facts, we shall not discuss. The confidence which men will place in them will depend on the notions they entertain of the scope of the imagination, and the measure in which they themselves possess it. The pleasure, likewise, which will be experienced from Wordsworth's poetry, will depend on the sympathies which the reader has in common with the poet. To persons either of fiery sensibility or cold understanding it would give but little satisfaction. To one it would appear tame, to the other mystical. Though his writings are not barren of those bursts of fine frenzy, which we all love to consider as characteristic of the bard, his nature is rather contemplative than impulsive. His imagination is most affluent, when it is pervaded by a calm, yet intense and lofty, spirit of meditation ; and its productions, therefore, do not seem so spontaneous, as if they gushed out in a stream of passionate feeling, under the influence of uncontrollable excitement. Indeed, in his most elevated flights, his soul seems humbled and awed before the Presence into which it comes, and hesitates to bring the fierce fire of human passions into regions "to which the heaven of heavens is but a veil." He is above the tempests and turbulence of life, and moves in regions where serenity is strength, and where he can perceive the "central peace,"

"Subsisting at the heart  
Of endless agitation."

The height and intensity of his feeling destroy the appearance of power, even when penetrated by its essence. In reading poetry, we are in danger of being deluded into panegyric by mere sound. Carlyle truly says, that "we do not call that man strong who takes convulsion fits, though in that state ten men cannot hold him." The broad, deep river of song, having its fountain in the human heart, and flowing on-

ward to the one great ocean, may make less noise in its progress than the glittering rivulet, which babbles and chatters the whole of its shallow way. But the rivulet dries up in the sun ; the river flows on for ever.

Wordsworth, as a delineator of the heart, is not so successful with the passions as with the affections. He has little of the Titan spirit in his constitution. His passion is "holy passion," — affection rendered intense by thought and imagination, and denuded of its strictly physical and earthly qualities. To us, there is an indescribable holiness and tenderness in his illustrations of the affections. The occasional puerilities of expression in his early poems are not sufficient to break the charm which they exercise on our minds. We feel, in reading them, the exquisite delicacy of his perception of the heart's immunities. There is no grade of life or being, which does not rise in our estimation and love, after it has been consecrated by his feelings. The beauty, dignity, and worth of human nature are more powerfully impressed upon our minds, after being taught the greatness and tenderness of which it is capable, in the exercise of its most common attributes. We are made to feel, that the unselfish affections are always to be honored and admired, as much in the humble and uninstructed, as in the noble and most intelligent ; that self-devotion is a greater thing than self-aggrandizement, though the former exist in a peasant, and the latter in a prince. Wordsworth's power of abstracting the sentiment from the circumstances which surround it, and making it stand out in the pure light of its own nature, is one prominent cause of the effect it has upon the feelings. A dramatist would include in his representation the whole character of the individual possessing it, and if there were any thing in its accompaniments to awaken other emotions, they would have their due place, so that the result upon the reader would closely resemble that of an incident in real life. We all know, that the sight of poverty and distress is not always unaccompanied by ludicrous sensations, and that there is often as much to excite disgust as pity. All persons are not able to survey humility, faith, and self-sacrifice in the poor and unintelligent with the pure feeling of respect. The taste, cultivation, and associations of the observer modify his perception of these qualities in others. But Wordsworth would impress us with so deep a veneration for them, that, when recognized in any

form, they should not only be sacred from ridicule, but should make us feel our own littleness in comparison. It is this very absence of dramatic power, this devotion to the thing itself, without regard to our associations growing out of the accidents of its situation, which confers upon Wordsworth's delineations of the affections so much potency. They form an era in the life of every man who reads them. They teach, that man has a property in his affections, which should be as sacred from violation as any which the law protects. Their influence is felt unconsciously by many who have read only to deride. On some men, we have no doubt, they have wrought a complete revolution in the feelings with which they regarded their fellow-beings. Their extensive circulation would be desired not only by the lovers of beauty and sentiment, but by all who would break down the barriers of selfishness, distrust, and pride, which separate man from man. We believe, that they are yet destined to exert, either directly or indirectly, a vast and beneficial influence upon society, by their agency in the imperceptible changes wrought in the manners and feelings of men, through the diffusion of just and beautiful sentiments of benevolence, charity, and love.

The grace, purity, and harmony, which the fineness of Wordsworth's affections often lends to his style and thought, are in the highest degree pleasing. It would be an easy labor to fill many pages in illustration. In "Vaudracour and Julia," we have the following description of love, which, for simplicity and truth, and the fine blending of imagination with feeling, so as to soften passion into beauty without shearing it of its strength, can hardly be excelled.

"Arabian fiction never filled the world  
With half the wonders that were wrought for him.  
Earth breathed in one great presence of the spring;  
Life turned the meanest of her implements,  
Before his eyes, to price above all gold;  
The house she dwelt in was a sainted shrine;  
Her chamber window did surpass in glory  
The portals of the dawn; all paradise  
Could, by the simple opening of a door,  
Let itself in upon him; pathways, walks,  
Swarmed with enchantment, till his spirit sank,  
Surcharged, within him, — overblest to move  
Beneath a sun that wakes a weary world  
To its dull round of ordinary cares;  
A man too happy for mortality!"



The following sonnet appears to us to present a singular combination of the most powerful and intense meditation with the utmost sweetness of feeling.

“ It is a beauteous evening, calm and free ;  
 The holy time is quiet as a nun  
 Breathless with adoration ; the broad sun  
 Is sinking down in its tranquillity ;  
 The gentleness of heaven is on the sea ;  
 Listen ! the mighty Being is awake,  
 And doth with his eternal motion make  
 A sound like thunder — everlastingly.  
 Dear child ! dear girl ! that walkest with me here,  
 If thou appear'st untouched by solemn thought,  
 Thy nature is not therefore less divine :  
 Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year ;  
 And worshipp'st at the temple's inner shrine,  
 God being with thee when we know it not.”

The closing stanzas of the poem which succeeds have a witching delicacy and grace of feeling and expression, which alone would enable Wordsworth to find his way into every loving heart.

“ A POET'S EPITAPH.

- “ Art thou a statesman, in the van  
 Of public business trained and bred ? —  
 First learn to love one living man ;  
 Then may'st thou think upon the dead.
- “ A lawyer art thou ? — draw not nigh ;  
 Go, carry to some fitter place  
 The keenness of that practised eye,  
 The hardness of that fallow face.
- “ Art thou a man of purple cheer, —  
 A rosy man, right plump to see ? —  
 Approach ; yet, Doctor, not too near ;  
 This grave no cushion is for thee.
- “ Or art thou one of gallant pride,  
 A soldier, and no man of chaff ? —  
 Welcome ! — but lay thy sword aside,  
 And lean upon a peasant's staff.
- “ Physician art thou ? one, all eyes,  
 Philosopher ? a fingering slave,  
 One that would peep and botanize  
 Upon his mother's grave ?
- “ Wrapt closely in thy sensual fleece,  
 O, turn aside, and take, I pray,  
 That he below may rest in peace,  
 That abject thing, thy soul, away !
- “ A moralist perchance appears ;  
 Led, Heaven knows how ! to this poor sod ;  
 And he has neither eyes nor ears ;  
 Himself his world, and his own God ;

" One to whose smooth-rubbed soul can cling  
Nor form, nor feeling, great nor small ;  
A reasoning, self-sufficient thing,  
An intellectual all-in-all !

" Shut close the door ; press down the latch ;  
Sleep in thy intellectual crust ;  
Nor lose ten tickings of thy watch  
Near this unprofitable dust.

" But who is he, with modest looks,  
And clad in homely russet brown ?  
He murmurs near the running brooks  
A music sweeter than their own.

" He is retired as noontide dew,  
Or fountain in a noon-day grove ;  
And you must love him, ere to you  
He will seem worthy of your love.

" The outward shows of sky and earth,  
Of hill and valley, he has viewed ;  
And impulses of deeper birth  
Have come to him in solitude.

" In common things that round us lie  
Some random truths he can impart,—  
The harvest of a quiet eye  
That broods and sleeps on his own heart.

" But he is weak, both man and boy,  
Hath been an idler in the land ;  
Contented if he might enjoy  
The things which others understand.

" Come hither in thy hour of strength ;  
Come, weak as is a breaking wave !  
Here stretch thy body at full length,  
Or build thy house upon this grave."

As far as any of Wordsworth's poems are narratives, they are narratives of thoughts and emotions, rather than actions. Meditation, imagination, and description, generally commingled in their operation, and bearing everywhere the legible impress of his own individuality, appear to be the characteristics of his poems. In the invention of character and incident he is deficient. The skeletons of his narratives present few points of interest and novelty. The filling up constitutes their value. "Peter Bell" is an example, the story being simply this. A vulgar potter, journeying through a wood, spies an ass kneeling beside a stream, and forms the intention of appropriating him to his own use. He mounts him, but the animal refuses to move, and his firmness is not shaken by the most furious blows. It appears, that the ass is keeping watch on the spot where his master has fallen into

the water, and that he has been there three or four days without food. Peter is affected by what he sees, comes to an understanding with the animal, is conducted to the house of the drowned man, informs his wife and children of the accident, is touched to the heart by their sorrow, muses desperately for some time on his moral condition, and

“ After ten months’ melancholy,  
Becomes a good and honest man.”

This is what may be called the story of the poem, and it seems sufficiently puerile. There are many stanzas, likewise, which are calculated to relax the most rigid muscles of the most rigid Wordsworthian. But the poem, considered as a whole, and viewed in regard to its meditations and descriptions, is grand and beautiful. In the high excellence of some of its details, it would be difficult to find its parallel. The description of Peter’s intellectual and corporeal frame, and the external influences to which he was subjected in the formation and redemption of his character, is exact and highly imaginative, both in conception and expression. The manner in which nature and human life are calculated to affect a heart naturally callous, and minister to its worst feelings, is traced with skilful power.

“ To all the unshaped, half-human thoughts  
Which solitary Nature feeds  
’Mid summer storms or winter’s ice,  
Had Peter joined whatever vice  
The cruel city breeds.

. . . . .  
“ He had a dark and sidelong walk,  
And long and slouching was his gait;  
Beneath his looks, so bare and bold,  
You might perceive his spirit cold  
Was playing with some inward bait.”

The skeleton of the story hardly rises above that of a nursery tale ; the thoughts, emotions, and imaginations, which it includes, are in the highest spirit of a profound poetical philosophy.

The ridicule which has been heaped upon Wordsworth, for the occasional singularities and tastelessness of his diction, we have no desire to echo. The courage with which he bore both it and the unpopularity which it excited is one sign, at least, that the faults were not mere affectations.

His works were successively received by the dominant critics in Edinburgh with a wild peal of elvish laughter, which rang far and wide over Great Britain ; but he still labored patiently on, with a devout willingness to bide his time. To attack him with the weapon of ridicule was, indeed,

“ Tilting with a straw  
Against a champion cased in adamant.”

In truth, Wordsworth's insensibility to ridicule was, to some extent, the source of many of the faults which provoked it. He seems to have had, comparatively, no appreciation of the ludicrous. He was too grave and earnest himself to calculate the effect of certain phrases and modes of expression upon minds which associated ideas differently. If a subject seemed to him dignified by innate properties, or a word appeared to him picturesque or expressive, he did not inquire how it would be regarded by others. He dwelt too much in his own mind, brooded too intensely over his own consciousness, lived a life too much apart from the flippancies and vivacities of society, to appreciate the condition of minds differently constituted, and subjected to different influences. The insignificant number of his violations of the established decencies of diction is, when we consider this fact, a good proof of his natural taste. The dishonesty of his adversaries consisted in quoting detached fragments of his works as characteristic of the whole, and thus misrepresenting him to the public. Imaginations that “soared into the highest heaven of invention,” thoughts of imperishable worth and grandeur, images of almost unspeakable beauty, sentiments of heavenly grace and purity, sweet humanities, calculated to find a home in every earnest heart, were overlooked or scoffed at, except by the pickpockets of letters, because they were sometimes accompanied by errors of taste and diffuseness of expression. Of course, such conduct made his few sympathizing readers champions of his errors of taste, and defenders of his diffuseness of expression.

The character and influence of Wordsworth have rarely been justly estimated. He has been doomed to suffer from the raptures of his disciples, and from the sarcasms of his adversaries. Men who could see nothing but puerilities in his “divine philosophy,” and men who could see nothing but “divine philosophy” in his puerilities, have both contributed

to injure his reputation. The injustice he experienced from the sneering critics naturally changed his admirers into partisans. To settle his position in the sliding scale of English poets was a task of some difficulty ; to call him a dreaming old woman, or a Heaven-inspired prophet, required but a glib motion of the tongue, or a few dashes of the pen. Consequently, he was not judged, but abused and eulogized ; ridiculed in newspapers and quoted in sermons ; a butt for the reviews and a pet for the parsons. For a number of years, the author of " Peter Bell " and " The Excursion," works replete with elevation of thought and grandeur of imagination, was believed, by many lovers of poetry, to be a queer old gentleman, residing somewhere about the Lakes in Cumberland, and spending his time, like Irving's Dutch burgo-master, in doing a deal of unintelligible thinking, and catching at ideas by the tail ; he was accused of laboring under the melancholy delusion, that he was the only poet, and of putting forth certain quantities of mystical trash every year to sustain his pretensions ; and of reproducing, in the literature of the nineteenth century, those curious legends of John Sprat and Master Horner, which had already been immortalized in the lyrics of an equally gifted old woman.

Lord Byron favored these unfounded prejudices by all the means in his power. It was policy in him to profess ignorance of Spenser, and contempt of Wordsworth. His remark on " The Excursion " is characteristic. " It was clumsy and frowsy, and his aversion." He acknowledged that there was " some talent spilt over it ; but it was like rain upon rocks, which falls and stagnates, or rain upon sands, which falls without fertilizing." He knew well how to seize upon those peculiarities of a poet, which he thought calculated to be popular, and, after disguising them in the splendid apparel of his own diction, and infusing into them the marvellous energy of his own passions, to represent their original proprietor as worthy only of his lordly sarcasm and disdain. His conduct in this respect reminds us of what Dryden says of Ben Jonson's plagiarisms :—" He has done his robberies so openly, that we see he fears not to be taxed by any law. He invades authors like a monarch, and what would be theft in any other poet is only victory in him."

Jeffrey's criticisms on Wordsworth in the *Edinburgh Review* probably contributed more than any thing else to

the comparative neglect with which his poems were treated by the public. These criticisms it is curious to read now, after they have lost all their sting, and are monuments only of the writer's brilliancy and bitterness. It would be wrong to assert, that they do not contain some just remarks ; but those who defend them overlook one important fact. Nobody complains that they ridiculed some perversities of the poet's taste, but that they also scoffed at the finest products of his peculiar genius. The "Ode to Duty," and the ode on the "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," receive little better treatment than such couplets as this ;

" A household tub, like one of those  
Which women use to wash their clothes."

The *critique* on "The Excursion" is, with all its cleverness, one of the most flippant, shallow, and inconsistent essays ever written. Some of the best passages in the poem, — that, for instance, which describes the sensations of the "growing youth,"

" When, from the naked top  
Of some bold headland, he beheld the sun  
Rise up, and bathe the world in light,"—

are quoted only to be qualified with the title of "stuff." It is the incapacity to discern merit, not the exposure of a few errors, which has turned these criticisms from satires on Wordsworth to satires on their author. Jeffrey's subtilty was altogether of the understanding. The most refined processes of feeling and imagination were lost upon him. His talents were never employed to more disadvantage, than when he attempted to criticise Wordsworth and Coleridge. The commiseration he expresses for the perversions of their genius, when he censures those very passages of their poems which are now considered the signs of their genius, appears at the present day more ludicrous than his most felicitous jests.

But a portion of Wordsworth's unpopularity in former years was undoubtedly owing to the faults of his own temper and disposition. That his writings did not sooner begin their ministry of good to the people must be attributed in some degree to himself. He gave his adversaries the advantage over him, by adhering to faults of taste which he

knew would be ridiculed. Besides, he had been in his youth a republican. He became afterwards a conservative, and, at times, volunteered his opinions on political matters with no small bitterness of expression. He seemed to rely too much on the "strength of backward-looking thoughts," and to be too deeply impressed with the "care prospective of our wise forefathers," to please an age mad with excitement about the present and the future. His love for England and English institutions was too undiscerning. He celebrated in verse many events which were deemed ominous to the cause of liberty. In truth, when Wordsworth deals with virtue, freedom, justice, and truth in the abstract, or blends them with majestic images drawn from the sublimest aspects of the universe, no poet can be more grand and impressive; but when he connects these with the acts and policy of English Tory politicians, or with the state and church of England, we are conscious that the analogy is false, if not ludicrous. Many have accordingly classed him with the poets of the past, rather than with the poets of the future, and have denied his claim to rank with those who sing prophecies of a new and better era for humanity. This opinion seems now to prevail, even among those who acknowledge the vast services he has performed to literature, and the importance of the revolution in poetry which he has done so much to achieve.

In our opinion, this is a sophism, arising from a confusion of things essentially different. Wordsworth may be a politician of the past, but he is emphatically a poet of the future. We have already alluded to his lack of practical understanding, and his ignorance of the ways of men. He surveyed things through a poetical medium, and did not, therefore, see them as they were, in the strict meaning of the term. His practical deductions are accordingly incorrect, for his premises are ideal. Lord Bacon's definition of poetry comprehends the whole matter. "Poetry serveth and conferreth to magnanimity, morality, and to delectation. And, therefore, it was ever thought to have some participation of divineness, because it doth raise and erect the mind, by submitting the shows of things to the desires of the mind." Now, Wordsworth, whether he appears to sing of the past or the present, is, in reality, singing of the future. His England of a thousand years past is the Utopia of a thou-

sand years to come. It is false history and true poetry. If he give objective existence to the ideals of his mind in one point of space or time rather than another, the character of the ideal still remains the same. They are ideals which, in fact, have never been realized, and which accordingly relate to some period far in advance of our own. They refer to a state of society, which the lowness of the ideals of many who object to his conservatism incapacitates them from anticipating. If, by some perversity of vision, the poet thinks he sees them partly realized in a corrupt government or in slavish institutions, the blame is to be laid to his eye, and not to his soul.

We will illustrate this by a few extracts. The sixth book of "The Excursion" begins thus :

" Hail to the crown, by Freedom shaped, to gird  
An English sovereign's brow ! and to the throne  
Whereon he sits ! whose deep foundations lie  
*In veneration and the people's love.*"

Now this is false history. It is true of no government in existence. A politician, of either Whig or Tory principles, would despise himself for saying so verdant a thing. It is, in fact, a prophecy of the time when the state will be so pure as to be seated in "veneration and a people's love." The salutation which follows, to the church, is to be interpreted with the same eye to a better condition of the morals and piety of the clergy. That this is the case may be seen from the sonnet to the memory of Milton, in 1802.

" Milton, thou shouldst be living at this hour !  
England hath need of thee ; she is a fen  
Of stagnant waters ; *altar, sword, and pen,*  
*Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,*  
Have forfeited their ancient English dower  
Of inward happiness."

Here, church, state, and the whole society of England are represented as "a fen of stagnant waters." Now, both representations cannot be true ; and yet both were undoubtedly projected from the poet's mind, and are significant, not of the real condition of his country, but of the change in his feelings from despondency to hope. There is no poetical inconsistency between the two. The last represents disgust at the present, arising from a comparison of the present with the ideal ; the first represents the ideal projected upon the present. The exaggeration in both cases is the natural result.



To prove that Wordsworth is not a poet of the future, we must prove that he did not advance beyond the present. Now, it would be difficult to name any contemporary poet whose ideals are higher than his. Lord Byron is generally considered his superior in this respect, because he had a harsh and jarring string in his lyre, and sang of revolution, and hailed the destruction of tyrants by the sword and the axe. In this respect, we humbly think that he was a poet of the past, for nothing can be less original than this mode of disposing of the world's oppressors. The quickest, surest, most natural, and most common method of obtaining rights is to kill him who deprives you of them. This, so far, has been the opinion of the human race, and has been expressed in divers ways at divers times. But one, in whose soul abide the eternal forms of beauty, goodness, truth, and virtue, — whose heart comprehends all mankind in its love, and thirsts for a period when universal benevolence will prevail upon the earth, — who would sing, “long before the blissful hour arrives,” the peaceful triumph of good over evil, and right over wrong, — to such a one, the usual mode of despatching oppressors is apt to be distasteful. He may think, that, in the present condition of things, the common course has its advantages ; but if he desires to impress on the hearts and imaginations of the people a model of a perfect state of society, he will, if he is a bard of the future, be likely to leave out some of the harsher and imperfect means and materials of the present. This, at least, was the feeling of Wordsworth and Shelley ; and this, we humbly conceive, is the Christian feeling.

Wordsworth is considered a champion of monarchy and aristocracy. We do not know but that there may be opinions expressed in his writings which can be forced to bear a construction inimical to political liberty ; still, if we consider the tendency of his whole works, we shall find them in the highest degree democratic. “The rights of man” is a phrase to which he gives a more extended application than could be given by any person of less universal sympathies. Mercy, justice, wisdom, piety, love, freedom, in their full beauty and grandeur, are the subjects of his song ; and we have yet to learn, that these can subsist with the slightest injury done to a human being. Indeed, he professes to have

“ Sympathies  
Aloft ascending, and descending down,  
Even to inferior kinds ” ;

and to teach the last hyperbole of toleration, that

“ He who feels contempt  
For any living thing hath faculties  
Which he has never used.”

That Wordsworth was unsuccessful in comments on the politics of the hour, and blundered often in applying his ideal standards to the wrong objects, we willingly admit ; but we think this is an objection to him as a practical politician and philosopher, and not an objection to him as a poet, “ submitting the shows of things to the desires of the mind.”

To estimate the degree of longevity which will attach to Wordsworth's poetry might be difficult ; but as he has built upon the enduring rock as well as the shifting sand, we cannot tolerate the idea that he will be swept away with things forgotten. As we pause thoughtfully before some of the majestic fabrics of his genius, they seem to wear the look of eternity. And when we consider the vast debt of delight we owe to him, the new inspiration he poured into poetry, and his delivery of it from the bondage of a hundred and fifty years, — the many teasing persecutions he has endured for humanity and literature ; — when we think of the consecrations he has shed upon our present existence, and the splendor of the vistas he has opened beyond the grave, — his desire to bring the harsh domain of the actual into closer vicinity to the sunny land of the ideal, — his kindling strains for freedom and right, — his warm sympathy with all that elevates and ennobles our being, and the sway he has displayed over its holiest and tenderest affections, — and the many images of beauty and grace with which he has brightened our daily life ; — when we consider these, his faults and errors seem to dwindle into insignificance ; reverence and love leap to our lips, and warm from the heart and brain springs our benison,

“ Blessings be on him, and eternal praise,  
Who gave us nobler loves and nobler cares ! ”

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